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POLICY ISSUES: COORDINATION AND COOPERATION WITHIN THE UNITED NATIONS

Implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification 1993-1994

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

The present report is prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 35/73 of 5 December 1980 and 39/168 B of 17 December 1984, which requested the Governing Council to report, through the Economic and Social Council, on the implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification (PACD). The present report summarizes the progress achieved in the implementation of the PACD, including in the Sudano-Sahelian region, during the period 1993-1994. It also puts forward proposed actions which the Council might wish to consider.

Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Governing Council may wish to:

(a) Express its support for ongoing efforts by the United Nations Environment Programme to support the development of an updated assessment methodology for drylands and desertification, including the development of appropriate indicators, based on improved national approaches involving communities, as well as its efforts in increasing awareness of desertification and in disseminating targeted information materials to a range of media;

(b) Request the Executive Director to maintain the function of UNEP as a global centre of excellence on desertification control, promoting cooperation and coordination of worldwide efforts to combat desertification and to continue and intensify research and development collaboration with leading world scientific institutions and centres of excellence on desertification and land degradation and drought issues, particularly on the social and economic aspects of these problems;

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(c) Authorize the Executive Director to submit, on behalf of the Council, her report on the implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification in 1993 and 1994, through the Economic and Social Council, to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session;

(d) Request the Executive Director to participate actively in assisting Governments and non-governmental and community-based organizations to implement the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the resolution on urgent action for Africa adopted by the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Convention and to support, within the limits of its available resources, the interim secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification;

(e) Request the Executive Director to: (i) report to the Governing Council at its nineteenth session on the outcome of the ongoing negotiations with United Nations Development Programme to transform their joint venture to combat desertification in the Sudano-Sahelian region into a Partnership to Combat Desertification and Drought; (ii) contribute to this Partnership, in the interim period before the nineteenth session, for earmarked programme activities to implement chapter 12 of Agenda 21 in developing countries, especially in Africa, and support the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the resolution for urgent action for Africa; and (iii) invite other organizations and agencies of the United Nations system, financial institutions, funds and other interested parties to join the Partnership and contribute to local, national, subregional and regional efforts of developing countries to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought;

(f) Recommend to the General Assembly that: (i) the work of both the Inter-agency Working Group on Desertification and the Consultative Group for Desertification Control be discontinued in its present form and suggest their reconstitution into a single coordination group for following up the implementation of chapter 12 of Agenda 21 and other desertification and drought-related activities set out in Agenda 21, thereby serving inter alia, to assist the function of the task manager on desertification in reporting to the Commission on Sustainable Development; and (ii) that the Executive Director, in collaboration with the members of the present Inter-agency Working Group on Desertification and the interim secretariat of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the elaboration of a convention to combat desertification, convene an ad hoc expert group to define the mandate of the new coordination group on desertification and advise on the roles of the different organizations and agencies in implementing chapter 12 of Agenda 21;

(g) Decide that reporting on activities in the Sudano-Sahelian region to implement the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification be subsumed in the reporting on activities of the United Nations Environment Programme worldwide for the implementation of chapter 12 of Agenda 21.

I. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN OF ACTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION 1993-1994

A. Technical assistance to Governments

1. In 1993-1994, UNEP continued to support Governments in developing and implementing national plans of action to combat desertification (NPACDs). The period was marked by an increase in activities as NPACDs were completed and launched, others began to be developed and other initiatives were begun.

2. NPACDs were launched and priority projects developed in Bahrain, Chile, Mexico, Mongolia, Oman, Pakistan, Peru, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Activities were initiated to develop NPACDs for Argentina, Bolivia and China, taking into account the more comprehensive approach demanded in the national action programmes to combat desertification (NAPCDs) called for under the Convention to Combat Desertification and Drought. Preparatory activities were undertaken in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and the Republic of Kalmykia in the Russian Federation.

3. In addition, UNEP assisted Governments in other desertification-related activities, including seminars and programme reviews. During the reporting period evaluations were carried out on pilot village projects in Zimbabwe and Uganda, under the Cairo Programme for African Cooperation of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN).

B. Regional actions and networks

4. In 1993-1994, UNEP provided assistance in the spheres of policy and strategy, project development, desertification assessment, information and training, village workshops and sharing project experience, to subregional organizations in sub-Saharan Africa, the Conference of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment (CAMRE), the African Deserts and Arid Lands Committee (ADALCO) and the Desertification Control Research and Training Network for Asia and the Pacific (DESCONAP).

5. UNEP continued to serve as the secretariat for ADALCO and to support DESCONAP, particularly in the establishment of a DESCONAP Regional Office in Tehran and the organization of regional meetings. It also collaborated with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to strengthen the Regional Technical Cooperation Network on Arid and Semi-arid Lands in the Latin American and Caribbean region and provided assistance to coordination meetings and for the publication of a network newsletter.

C. Training

6. In 1993-1994, 1,025 participants from developing countries attended training courses in different aspects related to desertification control and dryland management, organized by UNEP and other members of the Inter-agency Working Group on Desertification (IAWGD), namely the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED).

D. Assessment and mapping

7. UNEP activity continued in this area, through evaluating project results and organizing and supporting activities to develop assessment and mapping methodologies and make them operational in pilot countries such as China, Kenya and Pakistan. Various studies, meetings and workshops considered other aspects of desertification assessment and land management, such as the interaction between climate and desertification, soil resilience, the assessment of degradation in cultivated soils, indicators of sustainability, land quality and community evaluation of project activities, appropriate technologies for sustainable land management and economic valuation of environment and natural resources.

E. Evaluation and monitoring

8. As the task manager for reporting to the Commission on Sustainable Development on progress in implementing chapter 12 of Agenda 21, UNEP, in cooperation with other organizations, prepared the thematic report on desertification.

9. The evaluation of recommended "success-story" activities was continued. Ten case-studies were evaluated, eight were selected as having succeeded in sustainably controlling desertification and three were nominated for consideration for the Global 500 Award.

10. In environmental monitoring, UNEP support continued to the World Soil and Terrain Database (SOTER) project, the results of which will be used for the new global assessment of desertification.

F. Information

11. Four issues of the Desertification Control Bulletin, a special issue of Our Planet on desertification, the World Map of Present-day Landscapes and a study on the interactions of desertification and climate were completed. Copies of publications and other documents on desertification control were widely disseminated.

II. COORDINATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PACD WITHIN THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

12. The marked increase in joint activities in desertification control within the United Nations system and with other organizations, such as NGOs, covered fields such as strategic planning, assessment methodologies, scientific aspects of desertification, environmental information systems and operational field activities. This was particularly evident during the negotiation process of the Convention, where coordinated support was provided to the ad hoc secretariat and to Governments in affected countries, in the definition of the technical scientific and political issues involved and in the formulation of the texts of the Convention and the regional annexes.

13. Cooperation with NGOs increased in line with the role assigned to them in Agenda 21, and the cross-cutting nature of desertification control led to a growth of cooperation with centres of excellence and academic institutions. Similarly, linkages between different aspects of desertification as reflected in the various chapters of Agenda 21 also encouraged cooperation and coordination.

III. NEGOTIATIONS FOR THE CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION

14. UNEP played a notable role in the negotiation process for the Convention of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Convention to Combat Desertification (INCD), including substantive financial and technical support to the secretariat, to regional and subregional organizations, and to affected countries, for case-studies on desertification and for the participation of NGOs in the negotiation process. UNEP also contributed to the establishment of the International NGO Network on Desertification (RIOD). The success of UNEP efforts in providing support to African Governments, NGOs and subregional organizations for the negotiation process is reflected in the fact that 42 of the 53 countries in Africa had signed the Convention by the end of 1994.

15. UNEP participated actively, with the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Development Bank (ADB), in the joint secretariat, in the substantial input of OAU to the Convention and in the OAU Ad Hoc Group of Experts on desertification, which developed Africa's contribution to the negotiation process and drafted the Regional Implementation Annex for Africa, the resolution on urgent action for Africa and strategies for negotiating and implementing the Convention. In the second half of 1994, attention moved to planning activities for implementing the Convention, especially concerning urgent action in Africa, and to continuing support for the interim secretariat.

16. UNEP contributed substantively to background knowledge on desertification, particularly in relation to emerging issues. UNEP urged that the "right to remain" for those who so wish be incorporated in the Almeria Statement on desertification and migration. Studies on the social aspects of desertification, its effects on migration, the linkages between desertification and both biodiversity and climate were carried out and work on the subject of gender issues and desertification was begun. The workshop "Listening to the people: social aspects of dryland management" held in Nairobi in December 1993 aimed to develop a better understanding of "community participation" and "bottom-up development", in order to make recommendations for achieving sustainable development in the drylands. The success-story evaluations will provide tools for use in the community-level implementation of the NAPCDs requested under the Convention.

IV. FINANCING AND OTHER MEASURES IN SUPPORT OF THE PLAN OF ACTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION

17. UNEP participated with the other Global Environment Facility (GEF) partners in the preparation of an issues paper on the funding of the incremental costs of activities concerning land degradation, as they relate to the four GEF focal areas and on the operational strategy paper, both for consideration by the GEF Council.

V. ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SUDANO-SAHELIAN OFFICE

18. The UNSO programme focused on five major areas: the Convention process; national plans of action; drought preparedness and mitigation; environmental information systems; and local-level natural resources management. These were supported by information and resource mobilization activities.

19. In addition to support for African countries, UNDP/UNSO, as a member of the joint secretariat, supported OAU in the negotiation process for the Convention, in subregional consultations and for the OAU Expert Group on Desertification. After June 1994, attention turned to the preparation of NAPCDs, through support to national forums of partners, subregional organizations and NGOs.

20. The strategic framework processes programme continued, with attention being given to strengthening and ensuring coordination among national and local anti-desertification authorities; developing NPACDs; community empowerment; and harmonization in natural resources management programmes. In cooperation with the World Bank and ADB, the Network for Environment and Sustainable Development in Africa (NESDA) was established to operationalize the concept of sustainable development in Africa.

21. A programme was launched in East Africa to build capacity in drought-preparedness and mitigation in Ethiopia and provide support to the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD) for the preparation of a regional disaster- and drought-management strategy.

22. Concerning environmental information systems, the focus was on improved national and regional exchange of environmental information on a demand-driven, participatory basis, through the definition of priority needs in information, training and institutional mechanisms to manage environmental information. Work to identify and test desertification indicators for use at project level also began.

23. Project reviews attempted to identify constraints on implementation at local level, and country dialogue to exchange information among natural-resources-management projects was promoted. New approaches to land management, pastoralism and community participation were studied and developed. Two innovative projects combining anti-desertification efforts with schemes for carbon sequestration were funded during the GEF pilot phase.

24. Information dissemination and the publications programme continued with the regular updates on INCD negotiations, a poster, and technical publications providing background information to major themes of the Convention.

25. In response to the demands of Agenda 21 and the Convention, negotiations were begun in order to reorientate the joint venture mechanism into a Partnership to implement chapter 12 of Agenda 21 worldwide, and UNDP/UNSO began a resource mobilization campaign for the implementation of the Convention and, in particular, the resolution on urgent action for Africa.

26. As the central entity within UNDP coordinating UNDP system activities in desertification control, UNSO also developed a UNDP system-wide anti-desertification strategy.